Nan of Music Mountain

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

THE MORGAN GAP GANG STARTS TROUBLE AND DE SPAIN TAKES IMMEDIATE ACTION

The region around Sleepy Cat, a railroad division town in the Rocky mountain mine country, is infested with stage-coach robbers, cattle rustlers and gunmen. The worst of these belong to the Morgan gang, whose hang-out is in Morgan Gap, a fertile valley about 20 miles from Sleepy Cat and near Calabasas, a point where the horses are changed on the stage line from the Thief River mines to the railroad. Jeffries, superintendent of the Mountain division, decides to break up the depredations of the bad men and appoints Henry de Spain general manager of the stage line. De Spain goes to Calabasas with John Lefevre as his assistant. Things begin to happen.

CHAPTER III.

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The Spanish Sinks.

In two extended groups, separated by a narrow but well-defined break, a magnificent rampart, named by Spaniards the Superstition mountains, stretches beyond the horizon to the south, along the vast depression known as the Spanish sinks. The break on the eastern side of the chain comes about twenty miles southwest of Sleepy Cat, and is marked on the north by the most striking, and in some respects most majestic peak in the range—Music mountain; the break itself has taken the name of its earliest white settlers, and is called Morgan's gap. No railroad has ever yet penetrated this southern country, despite the fact that rich mines have been opened along these mountains, and are still being opened; but it lies today in much of the condition of primitive savagery, and lawlessness, as the word is conventionally accepted, that obtained when the first rush was made for the Thief River gold fields.

Business is done in this country; but business must halt everywhere with its means of communication, and in the Music Mountain country is still rests on the facilities of a stage line. The bullion wagons still travel the difficult roads. They look for safety to their armed horsemen; the four and six-horse stages look to the armed guard, the wayfarer must look to his horse—and it should be a good one; the mountain rancher to his rifle, the cattle thief to the moonless night, the bandit to his wits, the gunman to his holster; these include practically all the people that travel the Spanish sinks, except the Morgans and the Mormons. The Mormons looked to the Morgans for safety; the Morgans to themselves.

For many a year the Morgans have been almost overlords of the Music Mountain country. They own, or have laid claim to, an extended territory in the mountains, a Spanish grant. Morgan's gap opens south of Music mountain, less than ten miles west of Calabasas. It is a narrow valley where valleys are more precious than water—for the mountain valley means water—and this in a country where water is much more precious than life. And some of the best of this land at the foot of Music mountain was the maternal inheritance of Nan Morgan.

At Calabasas the Thief River stage line maintains completely equipped relay barns. They are over twenty miles from Sleepy Cat, but nearly fifty the other way from Thief river. And except a few shacks, there is nothing between Calabasas, Thief river and the mountains except sunshine and alkali. I say nothing, meaning especially nothing in the way of a human habitation.

The Calabasas inn stood in one of the loneliest canyons of the whole seventy miles between Sleepy Cat and Thief river; it looked in its depletion to be what it was, a somber, mysterious, sun, wind and alkali-beaten pile, around which was a ruin like those pretentious deserted structures sometimes seen in frontier towns—relics of the wide-open days, which stand afterward, stark and somber, to serve as bats' nests or blind pigs. The inn at Calabasas looked its part—a haunt of rustlers, a haven of nameless men, a refuge of road-agents.

The very first time De Spain made an inspection trip over the stage line with Lefever, he was conscious of the sinister air of this lonely building. He and Lefever had ridden down from the barn, while their horses were being changed, to look at the place. De Spain wanted to look over everything connected in any way, however remotely, with the operation of his wagons, and this joint, Lefever had told him, was where the freighters and drivers were not infrequently robbed of their money. It was here that one of their own men, Bill McCarty, once "scratched a man's neck" with a knife—which, Bill explained, he just "happened" to have in his hand—for cheating at cards. Lefever pointed out the unlucky gambler's grave as he and De Spain rode into the canyon toward the inn.

Not a sign of any sort was displayed about the habitation. No man was invited to enter, no man warned to keep out, none was anywhere in sight. The stage men dismounted, threw their lines, pushed open the front door of the house and entered a room of perhaps sixteen by twenty feet. A long, high bar stretched across the farther side of the room. The left end, as they faced the bar, was brought around to escape a small window opening on a court or patio to the rear of the room. Back of the bar itself, about midway, a low door in the bare wall gave entrance to a rear room. Aside from this the room presented nothing but walls. Two windows flanking the front door helped to light it, but not a mirror, picture, chair, table, bottle or glass was to be seen. De Spain covered every feature of the interior at a glance. "Quiet around here, John," he remarked casually.

"This is the quietest place in the Rocky mountains most of the time. But when it is noisy, believe me, it is noisy. Look at the bullet holes in the walls."

"The old story," remarked De Spain, inspecting with mild-mannered interest the punctured plastering, "they always shoot high."

He walked over to the left end of the bar, noting the hard usage shown by the ornate mahogany, and spreading his hands wide open, palms down, on the face of it, glanced at the low window on his left, opening on the graveled patio. He peered, in the semi-darkness, at the battered door behind the bar.

"Henry," observed Lefever, "if you are looking for a drink, it would only be fair, as well as politic, to call the Mexican."

De Spain, turning, looked all around the room again. "You wouldn't think," he said slowly, "from looking at the place there was a road-agent within a thousand miles."

"You wouldn't think, from riding through the Superstition mountains there was a lion within a thousand miles. I've hunted them for eleven years, and I never saw one except when the dogs drove 'em out; but for eleven years they saw me. If we haven't been seen coming in here by some of this Calabasas bunch, I miss my guess," declared Lefever cheerfully.

The batten door behind the bar now began to open slowly and noiselessly. Lefever peered through it. "Come in, Pedro," he cried reassuringly, "come in, man. This is no officer, no revenue agent looking for your license. Meet a friend, Pedro," he continued encouragingly, as the swarthy publican, low-browed and sullen, emerged very deliberately from the inner darkness into the obscurity of the barroom, and bent his one good eye searchingly on De Spain. "This," Lefever's left hand lay familiarly on the back of De Spain's shoulder, "is our new manager, Mr. Henry de Spain. Henry, shake hands with Mexico."

This invitation to shake hands seemed an empty formality. De Spain never shook hands with anybody; at least if he did so, he extended, through habit long inured, his left hand, with an excuse for the soreness of his right. Pedro did not even bat his remaining eye at the invitation. The situation, as Lefever facetiously remarked, remained about where it was before he spoke, when the sound of galloping horses came through the open door. A moment later three men walked, single file, into the room. De Spain stood at the left end of the bar, and Lefever introduced him to Gale Morgan, to David Sassoon, and to Sassoon's crony, Deaf Sandusky, as the new stage-line manager. The later arrivals lined up before the bar, Sandusky next to Lefever and De Spain, so he could hear what was said. Pedro from his den produced two queer-looking bottles and a supply of glasses.

"De Spain," Gale Morgan began bluntly, "one of our men was put off a stage of yours last week by Frank Elpaso." He spoke without any preliminary compliments, and his heavy voice was bellicose.

De Spain, regarding him undisturbed, answered after a little pause: "Elpaso told me he put a man off his stage last week for fighting."

"No," contradicted Morgan loudly, "not for fighting. Elpaso was drunk."

"What's the name of the man Elpaso put off, John?" asked De Spain, looking at Lefever.

Morgan hooked his thumb toward the man standing at his side. "Here's the man right here, Dave Sassoon."

Sassoon never looked a man in the face when the man looked at him, except by implication; it was almost impossible, without surprising him, to catch his eyes with your eyes. He seemed now to regard De Spain keenly, as the latter, still attending to Morgan's statement, replied: "Elpaso tells a pretty straight story."

"Elpaso couldn't tell a straight story if he tried," interjected Sassoon.

"I have the statement of three other passengers; they confirm Elpaso. According to them, Sassoon—" De Spain looked straight at the accused, "was drunk and abusive, and kept trying to put some of the other passengers off. Finally he put his feet in the lap of Pumperwasser, our tank and windmill man, and Pumperwasser hit him."

Morgan, stepping back from the bar, waved his hand with an air of finality toward his inoffensive companion: "Here is Sassoon, right here—he can tell the whole story."

"Those fellows were miners," muttered Sassoon. His utterance was broken, but he spoke fast. "They'll side with the guards every time against a cattleman."

"Sassoon," interposed Morgan belligerently, "is a man whose word can always be depended on."

"To convey his meaning," intervened Lefever cryptically. "Of course, I know," he asserted, earnest to the point of vehemence. "Everyone in Calabasas has the highest respect for Sassoon. That is understood. And," he added with as much impressiveness as if he were talking sense, "everybody in Calabasas would be sorry to see Sassoon put off a stage. But Sassoon is off: that is the situation. We are sorry. If it occurs again—"

"What do you mean?" thundered Morgan, resenting the interference. "De Spain is the manager, isn't he? What we want to know is, what you are going to do about it?" he demanded, addressing De Spain again.

"There is nothing more to be done," returned De Spain composedly. "I've already told Elpaso if Sassoon starts another fight on a stage to put him off again."

Morgan's fist came down on the bar. "Look here, De Spain! You come from Medicine Bend, don't you? Well, you can't bully Music Mountain men—understand that."

"Any time you have a real grievance, Morgan, I'll be glad to consider it," said De Spain. "When one of your men is drunk and quarrelsome he will be put off like any other disturber. That we can't avoid. Public stages can't be run any other way."

"All right," retorted Morgan. "If you take that tack for your new management, we'll see how you get along running stages down in this country."

"We will run them peaceably, just as long as we can," smiled De Spain. "We will get on with everybody that gives us a chance."

Morgan pointed a finger at him. "I give you a chance, De Spain, right now. Will you discharge Elpaso?"

"No."

Morgan almost caught his breath at the refusal. But De Spain could be extremely blunt, and in the parting shots between the two he gave no ground.

"Jeffries put me here to stop this kind of rowdyism on the stages," he said to Lefever on their way back to

For Many a Year the Morgans Have Been Overlords of the Music Mountain Country.

the barn. "This is a good time to begin. And Sassoon and Gale Morgan are good men to begin with," he added.

As the horses of the two men emerged from the canyon they saw a slender horsewoman riding in toward the barn from the Music Mountain trail. She stopped in front of McAlpin, the barn boss, who stood outside the office door. McAlpin, the old Medicine Bend barnman, had been promoted from Sleepy Cat by the new manager. De Spain recognized the roan pony, but, aside from that, a glance at the figure of the rider, as she sat with her back to him, was enough to assure him of Nan Morgan. He spurred ahead fast enough to overhear a request she was making of McAlpin to mail a letter for her. She also asked McAlpin, just as De Spain drew up, whether the down stage had passed. McAlpin told her it had. De Spain, touching his hat, spoke: "I am going right up to Sleepy Cat. I'll mail your letter if you wish."

She looked at him in some surprise, and then glanced toward Lefever, who now rode up. De Spain was holding out his hand for the letter. His eyes met Nan's, and each felt the moment was a sort of challenge. De Spain, a little self-conscious under her inspection, was aware only of her rather fearless eyes and the dark hair under her fawn cowboy hat.

"Thank you,' she responded evenly. "If the stage is gone I will hold it to add something." So saying, she tucked the letter inside her blouse and spoke to her pony, which turned leisurely down the road.

"I'm trying to get acquainted with your country today," returned De Spain, managing with his knee to keep his own horse moving alongside Nan as she edged away.

Nan, without speaking, ruthlessly widened the distance between the two. De Spain unobtrusively spurred his steed to greater activity. "You must have a great deal of game around you. Do you hunt?" he asked.

He knew she was famed as a huntress, but he could make no headway whatever against her studied reserve and when at length she excused herself and turned her pony from the Sleepy Cat road into the Morgan gap trail, De Spain had been defeated in every attempt to arouse the slightest interest in anything he had said. But, watching with regret, at the parting, the trim lines of her figure as she dashed away on the desert trail, seated as if a part of her spirited horse, he felt only a fast-rising resolution to attempt again to break through her stubborn reticence and know her better.

CHAPTER IV.

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First Blood at Calabasas.

Nothing more than De Spain's announcement that he would sustain his stage-guards was necessary to arouse a violent resentment at Calabasas and among the Morgan following. The grievance against Elpaso was made a general one along the line. His stage was singled out and ridden at times both by Sandusky and Logan—the really dangerous men of the Spanish sinks—and by Gale Morgan and Sassoon to stir up trouble.

All Calabasas knew that Elpaso, if he had to, would fight, and that the eccentric guard was not actually to be cornered with impunity. Even Logan, who, like Sandusky, was known to be without fear and without mercy, felt at least a respect for Elpaso's shortened shotgun, and stopped this side actual hostilities with him. Sassoon, however, nourished a particular grievance against the meditative guard, and his was one not tempered either by prudence or calculation. His chance came one night when Elpaso had unwisely allowed himself to be drawn into a card game at Calabasas inn. Elpaso was notoriously a stickler for a square deal at cards. A dispute found him without a friend in the room. Sassoon reached for him with a knife.

McAlpin was the first to get the news at the barn. He gave first aid to the helpless guard, and, without dreaming he could be got to a surgeon alive, rushed him in a light wagon to the hospital at Sleepy Cat, where it was said that he must have more lives than a wildcat. Sassoon, not caring to brave De Spain's anger in town, went temporarily into hiding. Elpaso, in the end, justified his old reputation by making a recovery—haltingly, it is true, and with perilous intervals of sinking, but a recovery.

It was while he still lay in the hospital and hope was very low that De Spain and Lefever rode, one hot morning, into Calabasas and were told by McAlpin that Sassoon had been seen within five minutes at the inn. To Lefever the news was like a bubbling spring to a thirsty man. His face beamed, he tightened his belt, shook out his gun and looked with benevolent interest on De Spain, who stood pondering. "If you will stay right here, Henry," he averred convincingly, "I will go over and get Sassoon."

The chief stage-guard, Bob Scott, the Indian, was in the barn. He smiled at Lefever's enthusiasm. "Sassoon," said he, "is slippery."

"You'd better let us go along and see you do it," suggested De Spain, who with the business in hand grew thoughtful.

"Gentlemen, I thank you," protested Lefever, raising one hand in deprecation, the other resting lightly on his holster. "We still have some little reputation to maintain along the sinks. Don't let us make it a posse for Sassoon." No one opposed him further, and he rode away alone.

"It won't be any trouble for John to bring Sassoon in," murmured Scott, who spoke with a smile and in the low tone and deliberate manner of the Indian, "if he can find him."

Lefever rode down to the inn without seeing a living thing anywhere about it. When he dismounted in front he thought he heard sounds within the barroom, but, pushing open the door and looking circumspectly into the room before entering, he was surprised to find it empty. He noticed, however, that the sash of the low window on his left, which looked into the patio, was open, and two heelmarks in the hard clay suggested that a man might have jumped through. Running out of the front door, he sprang into his saddle and rode to where he could signal De Spain and Scott to come up.

He told his story as they joined him, and the three returned to the inn. A better tracker than either of his companions, Scott after a minute confirmed their belief that Sassoon must have escaped by the window. He then took the two men out to where someone, within a few minutes, had mounted a horse and galloped off.

"But where has he gone?" demanded Lefever, pointing with his hand. "There is the road both ways for three miles." Scott nodded toward the snow-capped peak of Music mountain. "Over to Morgan's, most likely. He knows no one would follow him into the gap."

"After him!" cried Lefever hotly. De Spain looked inquiringly at the guard. Scott shook his head. "That would be all right, but there's two other Calabasas men in the gap this afternoon it wouldn't be nice to mix with—Deaf Sandusky and Harvey Logan."

"We won't mix with them," suggested De Spain.

"If we tackle Sassoon, they'll mix with us," explained Scott. He reflected a moment. "They always stay at

Morgan's Fist Came Down on the Bar.

Gale Morgan's or Duke's. We might sneak Sassoon out without their getting on. Sassoon knows he is safe in the gap; but he'll hide even after he gets there. I've got the Thief River run this afternoon—"

"Don't take your run this afternoon," directed De Spain. "Telephone Sleepy Cat for a substitute. Suppose we go back, get something to eat, and you two ride singly over toward the gap this afternoon; lie outside under cover to see whether Sassoon or his friends leave before night—there's only one way out of the place, they tell me. Then I will join you, and we'll ride in before daylight, and perhaps catch him while everybody is asleep."

"If you do," predicted Scott, in his deliberate way of expressing a conclusion, "I think you'll get him."

It was so arranged.

De Spain joined his associates at dark outside the gap. Neither Sassoon nor his friends had been seen. The night was still, the sky cloudless, and as the three men with a led horse rode at midnight into the mountains, the great red heart of the Scorpion shone afire in the southern sky. Spreading out when they rode between the mountain walls, they made their way without interruption silently toward their rendezvous, an aspen grove near which Purgatoire creek makes its way out of the gap.

You'll find in the next installment that De Spain has picked a mighty big job for himself. Not the least of his troubles in the immediate future is pretty Nan Morgan, pride of the gang.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Took It the Wrong Way.

A draper is bemoaning the loss of a customer at L——. A lady was in the shop on Saturday and bought some goods.

"How much is it?"

"One dollar."

"Dear me! Ninety-five cents is all I have with me. Cannot you let me have it for that?"

"Really, I could not," said the draper, "but you can pay the next time you are in."

"Oh, but suppose I should die?" laughingly inquired the lady.

"It would be a small loss," rejoined the draper, but he saw from behind the injured look the customer wore as she crept out of the door that he had made a mistake somewhere, though it did not dawn upon him until too late.—Exchange.

Writers That Count.

Two sorts of writers possess genius: those who think, and those who cause others to think.—Joseph Roux.

THE BASIS OF CANADA'S RICHES

A Theme Discussed by the Wall Street Journal.

In speaking of Canada a short time ago the Wall Street Journal made the statement that "The basis of Canada's riches is the fertility of the soil, and no freak of warfare can injure that while her grain will increase in demand as the population of the world grows. As an investment field Canada is worthy of consideration." These words are well worthy of attention, especially coming from such a source as this eminent financial journal. With a land area exceeding that of the United States and with tillable areas coming under cultivation, the wealth of Canada's future can scarcely be estimated, while the wealth today is such as to bring her most prominently before the world.

During the past year thousands of farmers in Western Canada sold their crops for more than the total cost of their land. Lands at from $15 to $30 an acre produced crops worth $40 to $75 an acre. Stock raising and dairying were equally profitable.

The year 1915 saw most wonderful crops and magnificent yields over the entire country, and many farmers wiped out indebtedness that had hung over them long before they came to the country, and the year 1916 put them in a condition of absolute independence. A report to hand verified by a high official might seem marvelous, were the particulars not well known, and where are not other cases that would seem almost as phenomenal. This is a southern Alberta story: A farmer wished to rent an adjoining farm on which a loan company held a mortgage. The applicant said he wanted the first ten bushels of wheat, after which he would divide, giving the loan company one-third. After threshing he paid into the bank at Calgary $16 per acre for every acre cultivated, to the credit of the loan company, as their share or their third of the crop. Sixteen dollars per acre rent. His two-thirds was $32 and in addition the first ten bushels of wheat. Land on this same security can be purchased for from $16 to $30 per acre. Wonderful yields are reported from all parts of this district. Recently 4,640 acres of a ranch were sold to an Illinois farmer; 300 acres of wheat in 1916 produced a yield that averaged 42½ bushels of wheat per acre. George Richard, formerly of Providence, R. I., on a southern Alberta farm got 2,052 bushels of wheat from a 50-acre field, or over 40 bushels per acre, and from a 50-acre field of oats got a return of 76 bushels per acre and still had some sheaves left over for feeding.

A report just issued by the Alberta government gives the yield of wheat in the showing of 1916 as 28 bushels per acre; 45 bushels of oats and 30 bushels of barley.

Travelers through Alberta's wheat belt have had revealed to them scenes of agricultural productiveness unapproached in any other part of the world.

Alberta farms, selected with even moderate discretion, have raised men to independence and affluence with records of wonderful development unsurpassed amongst the phenomenal industrial success of which Canada well may boast.

Many almost incredible yields have been reported by reliable authorities, wheat exceeding 70 bushels per acre and oats 145 bushels.

Numerous records show that the cost of farms has been more than repaid by this year's crop. In one instance, land purchased for $3,200 produced wheat which was sold for a little over $10,000.

During the year 1917 there will be an immense amount of labor required to take care of the crop in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

One of the problems which Western Canada has to face every year is the securing of an adequate supply of labor to handle the harvesting and threshing of its big crops. This problem, indeed, is always present in any country that has a big agricultural production; in the case of Western Canada it is enhanced by the comparative sparsity of population and the long distance from industrial districts, which can be expected to offer a surplus of labor.

In Western Canada the present difficulties are increased by the war. A very large number of Western Canada's small population have enlisted for service with the Canadian forces in Europe, and at the present time there is generally speaking no surplus of labor for the ordinary channels of industry, to say nothing of the abnormal demands of harvest time. The situation, however, has to some extent been met by the action of the Canadian militia department, who have released all such men who are still in training in the western military camps and who desire to engage in harvest work for a period of generally one month.

The actual number of men engaged in 1916 in harvest work was between forty and fifty thousand. Wages were higher than usual, running from $2.50 to $4.00 a day with board, and from $35 to $60 a month.—Advertisement.

Gain in Loss.

He that loses anything and gets wisdom by it, is a gainer by the loss.—L'Estrange.

St. Peter's cathedral in Rome will accommodate 54,000 people.